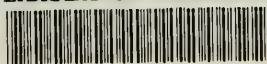


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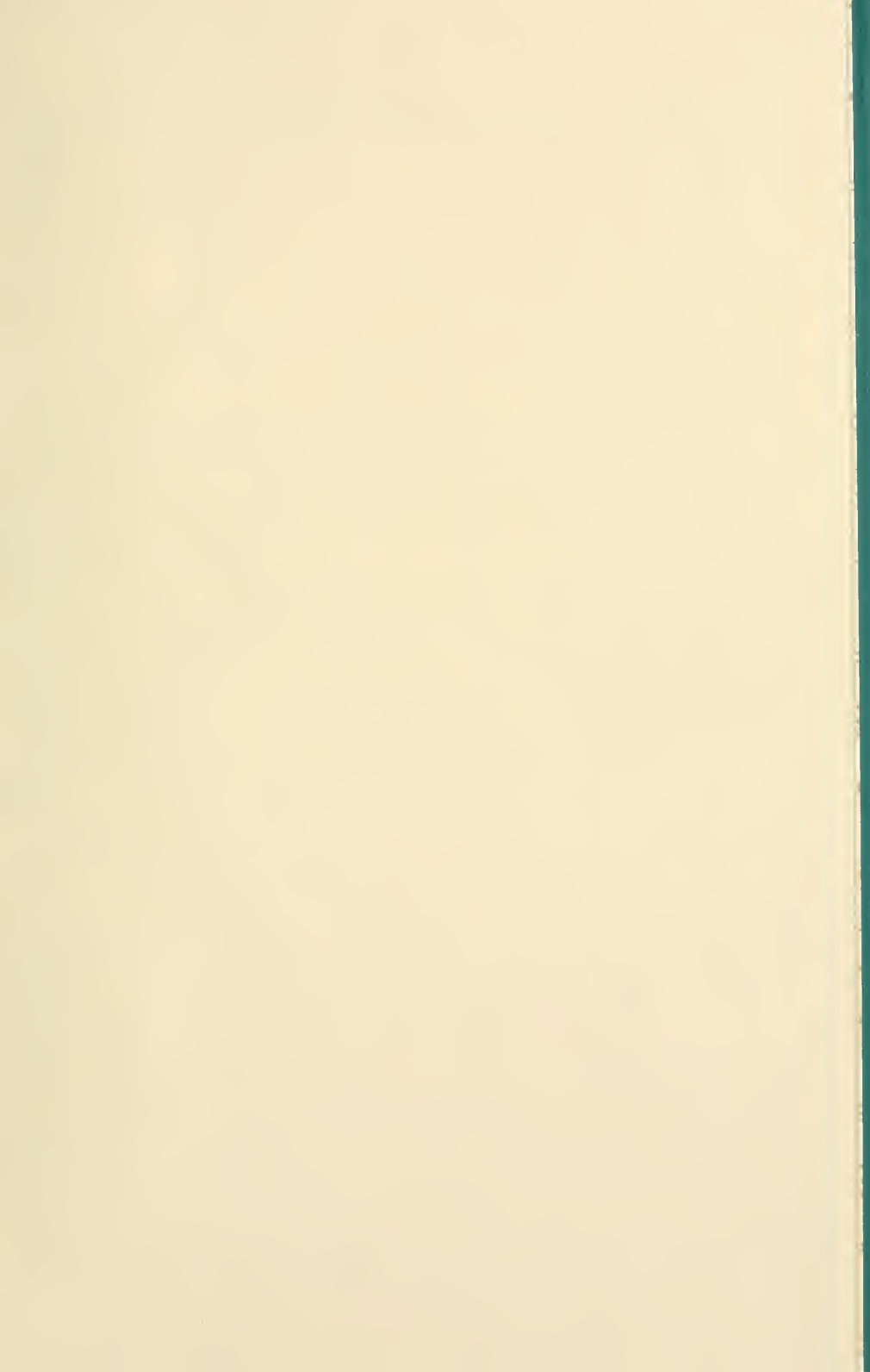
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THE ORGANIZATION PROBLEM
of
Jewish Community Life
in America

by

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I.

In the discussion of this topic we must at the outset assume that there is valid reason for the existence of distinctly Jewish communities wherever a *minyan* (at least ten adult Jews) dwell in one place, because their interests in some respects are distinct from the interests of other people living in the same place. These special interests may be religious, educational and philanthropic—never political. It is cause for satisfaction that the Jews of this country have never presented a homogeneous attitude, as Jews, toward any political question, except where such a question involved the rights and dignities of American citizenship, as in the Russian passport matter. Here the Jews united to secure the abrogation of the treaty with Russia, because that treaty, in discriminating against the Jews of the United States, was an affront to American citizenship. Attempts on the part of politicians to create Jewish political clubs and groups have met uniformly with such vehement resentment on the part of all Jewish elements as to indicate unmistakably that in politics the Jews do not desire to be a community. Political elections have shown that Jews are divided on political questions so freely that there cannot be the barest suspicion that racial or religious considerations at any time constitute a basis for political affiliations.

In religious matters and in philanthropic affairs they have followed distinct lines, quite like other religious and racial elements in the population. But in these fields they have not been united; in fact, there have been such sharp divisions as to make the word "community," as descriptive of their organized charities, an inaccurate term, if not an actual misnomer.

The reasons for these divisions are to be traced ultimately to the fact that the Jews of America, though ethnologically one race, come from many different countries of the globe and naturally possess differences of traditions, customs, theologies, language, outline, and frequently even of physique. If we add to these differences in economic condition, perhaps the most vital of all factors, and the difference

in the date of their settlement in this country, we will not wonder at the lack of unity and homogeneity that obtains among them.

Had the influx of Jews into this country from western and eastern Europe occurred at the same time, the difficulties in promoting a community of thought and action would have been much less, in spite of the differences obtaining among them. It has been customary for the early settler to regard the later arrival as inferior. The tendency of the one-year immigrant to regard his fellow-townsmen who has just arrived as a "green-horn," an inferior being, has been so common as to prove the subject of humorous treatment by Yiddish writers and playwrights.

The tendency, therefore, on the part of the earlier German Jewish settlers to look askance upon the later Russian Jewish immigrants was not to be wondered at, especially as Yiddish, the language which the newcomer spoke, appeared to the others as a badly lacerated tongue. In addition, their uncouth appearance, their ancient ritualism and their poverty combined to stamp them, in the eyes of the older comfortably situated and more polished co-religionists, as of inferior caste.

Then, too, the two main points of contact between the two elements were such as to provoke friction. The first was intimate industrial contact. In the main, the older settlers, already firmly established and prosperous, were largely of the employing class—merchants and manufacturers. The newcomers, arriving penniless, were happy to secure employment in their establishments. The antagonisms generally obtaining between labor and capital could only help to intensify the distaste already existing. Where the employees, whether through shrewdness or self-denial and resourcefulness, became a business competitor, the feeling became resentful and the notions of caste grew stronger.

The second point of contact was, unfortunately, the charitable organization. As soon as Russian Jewish immigration began, the Jews of this country organized and raised funds to help the newcomers. The spirit which actuated them forms one of the brightest pages in the history of Jewish philanthropy in this country. The help they rendered was both intelligent and generous, testifying to the good-heartedness and liberality of the "German" Jews. But contact with the dependent and poverty-stricken elements of any people is not conducive to respect for them. The erroneous and deplorable, though natural, impression gained ground even among the best men and women that these applicants for relief were typical

of all the immigrants from eastern Europe. There was quickly established between the two elements the unfortunate relation of benefactor and beneficiary, which was made still more difficult by unsympathetic treatment on the part of untrained and ill-paid charity clerks and even ignorant volunteer workers, on the one hand, and an extreme sensitiveness and emotionalism, on the other hand, on the part of those who sought aid.

Under these circumstances it was but natural, as the newcomers became more firmly established, for them to organize their mutual aid societies and even their own charitable organizations. Though they respected the "German" Jews' capacity for organization, they were not in sympathy with the business methods in vogue with their charities. Furthermore, they were not invited in any way to take substantial part in the work of the older philanthropic agencies; so when they felt the call for social service, they naturally organized their own machinery.

The result is that there have been developed in every community of any considerable size charitable organizations of varied character, which have frequently duplicated the work of older organizations and have followed policies and methods not approved by these organizations. The aloofness on the part of many well-to-do Russian Jews from the older charitable organizations has, moreover, tended to give those supporting them the impression that the former are niggardly and lacking in a sense of communal responsibility.

Then, again, world currents in Jewish life have moved the newer elements of the people profoundly, whereas the older elements have been quite indifferent and sometimes antagonistic. The Zionist movement, regardless of what our views may be with respect to its final purpose, must be conceded to be a remarkable renaissance of Jewish racial self-respect and dignity. For the large part, it has been viewed with disapproval and distrust, and even apprehension, by the older settlers, who, basking in the sunshine of American liberty of conscience and action, feared the effect upon our non-Jewish neighbors and fellow-citizens. Socialism, which had gained many adherents among the newcomers of the wage-earning and professional classes, was another world-current which disturbed the placidity of the bourgeois life-stream of the older inhabitants, who confused and confounded it with anarchism and regarded it as a grave danger to their comfort.

Thus, these conservative Jews, who had by their words and deeds striven hard to vindicate their reputation as law-abiding and patri-

otic Americans, were placed in the position of apologizing to their equally conservative and patriotic non-Jewish fellow-citizens for the disagreeable and, to them, questionable theories and practices of their alien co-religionists.

Now that the eastern European immigrants have become numerically predominant and many of them prosperous, they desire participation in the larger affairs of life. Some of them have become impatient with the present communal leadership and with what they consider undemocratic methods employed by that leadership. They are agitated by a strong desire to have a corresponding voice in the selection of the leadership. The European war, with the uncertainties of its outcome, has afforded them an opportunity of arousing nation-wide interest in any sympathy for their plans to establish a congress in the face of opposition on the part of those who heretofore have been the spokesmen and leaders of American Jewry. This movement has, unhappily, sharply accentuated the dissatisfaction arising out of the many differences to which I have alluded, and has thereby made increasingly difficult, for the time being at any rate, the task of those who have advocated and labored for a united Jewry. The issues have been somewhat confused. There are essentially two issues: one of general policy with regard to the political situation of Jews in foreign countries; the other a question of the organization of the Jewish people of America. If the second issue can be satisfactorily settled, the first will prove less difficult. I shall revert to this at some length later. I have here attempted merely very briefly to analyze the more important factors which have been responsible for the gap which has prevailed, and which has made difficult the unification of effort for the common welfare.

That it is desirable for the common good to secure unity of interest and of purpose among these various groups is a premise that we all, I take it, are prepared to establish. In order to do this, we must at the very beginning emphasize as strongly as possible that a union cannot be brought about unless it is predicated upon the basic principle of mutual understanding and mutual respect. Because this principle has not been uniformly recognized—indeed, frequently violated—these differences have in some respects not only been obliterated, but accentuated.

II.

In the consideration of this subject, it would be well to consider the organization problems of local communities on the one hand, and of the national community on the other.

What are the problems of a local community? What are its needs—religious, industrial, educational and philanthropic? What are its resources? What is its machinery for utilizing these resources and supplying these needs? What are the dangers which threaten the community? What are its safeguards against them, and its means to prevent them? What is its contact with the general community of which it forms a part?

The smaller the community, the easier it is to answer these questions and the simpler its task to effect proper co-operation on the part of all its component parts, be they individual or groups. In the main, the problems are the same in the large communities, though more complex. In a survey of a dozen of the larger communities of the interior, recently made, I found different kinds, ranging from the very loosely co-ordinated to the closely united. In none was there found a completely organized community. Where solidarity or cohesiveness was conspicuous, it obtained chiefly with regard to one aspect of Jewish community life—that is, with respect to its philanthropic interests. Indeed, this phase of communal activity has been the be-all and end-all apparently of community planning and articulation. Few even of the most active leaders in these communities have had more than philanthropic perspective. The concept "federation of charities" has been to them the final word and ultimate idea defining community life. The religious problems, if they have not been of negligible interest, have been considered largely of a private character, circumscribed at best by the walls of the synagogue to which the people have happened to belong. The industrial problems have not been considered a legitimate concern of the community, except in so far as they have resulted in dependency, when they became an object with which the Charities had to deal. The education of the children and the youth of the community has likewise been ignored as a community problem, and, like the religious affairs, has been left to parents, except in those few instances where children are inmates of institutions supported by the community; and perhaps in some degree to the meagre facilities for Jewish education afforded in the social centers supported by the community. Where from time to time the sentiment of the community on other than philanthropic subjects required expression, it has been voiced,

not authoritatively, but by an individual or individuals who, by reason of prominence or ability, were called upon or themselves offered to do so. In the smaller communities this has usually been a satisfactory method; in the larger communities it has not been so satisfactory. Some times it has been embarrassing.

In order to develop a rich and comprehensive community life we must enlarge our vision and see beyond the philanthropic boundaries. We must understand that happily, after all, only a very small proportion of our people are in need of charitable aid; but that a large proportion need aid of a different kind, which they can only properly procure by a union of forces, *of which they themselves should form an important part*. They must be afforded reasonable industrial opportunities and be protected against industrial exploitation; they must be given educational facilities where they are not provided by government; they must be protected against all disintegrating forces which surround them and threaten their physical and spiritual well-being, by being furnished wholesome diversions and religious and ethical training, and free scope, too, to conserve and express the culture which they have brought with them as a heritage from the past. They should be encouraged to organize their own activities and to develop them, be they along industrial or social or religious lines, even if the character of such organizations may not be precisely the kind we would create for them. Must they unite into labor organizations for their protection? Then let them; indeed, help them, because the more strongly they are organized the more responsible and responsive will they be to public sentiment. Do they desire to form mutual aid societies? Let them; indeed, encourage them in every way, for there is no more potent protection against economic disaster and no more effective group discipline than this form of organization. Do they desire to worship God in the same way as their fathers and adhere to their ritual observances and train their children in the same conservative way? Let them, and aid them, even though we may not ourselves observe these forms of worship or educate our children by their curriculum, for there is no surer means to promote good citizenship, respect for law and order and civil responsibility.

It is contrary to all historic experience to expect all humanity to be cast into one mould. The human melting pot is fiction and unreality. Where races and nationalities have disappeared they have been destroyed by conquering races and nations; they have not been voluntarily assimilated. Freedom to a race or group to develop its own culture is the surest safeguard against hyphenism. In England,

where the Jewish spirit has been least suppressed and where Jewish religious life has been least hampered by racial and religious prejudice, there has developed a loyalty and devotion to the country on the part of its Jewish subjects not exceeded in intensity by those whose British blood can be traced back for centuries. Does the distinctly Jewish culture perhaps express itself crudely or in uncouth form? Let this not annoy us; with our help it can soon be made acceptable and attractive.

Some may think that as we have drawn the line at political organization, so should we avoid including in our community life all considerations of an industrial character. In their opinion, issues between labor and capital, employees and employer, are so vital in effect and so delicate in character that they may prove to be the rocks upon which the community organization may be wrecked. Moreover, it appears to many that there is nothing of a sectarian character in the relations between Jewish employer and employee. There are very few industries, furthermore, where some non-Jews are not employed. In small cities industrial relations do not ordinarily assume a Jewish character or involve the need for the Jewish community's interest, except where work must be found for the Jewish unemployed or where race discrimination asserts itself against them. In the large cities, however, certain industries have developed to a large degree on Jewish lines—notably, the garment industries. The manufacturers on the one hand are nearly all, if not all, Jews, and the workers have organized as distinctly Jewish trade unions—for example, the United Hebrew Trades and the Workman's Circle. What they do, therefore, affects not only the community at large, but particularly their fellow-Jews. In the labor parade of Monday of last week, the Poale Zion, a Zionist labor circle, marched along Fifth Avenue singing the Zionist national anthem, "Hatikvah." Though it is difficult to see the relation between the cloak makers' lockout and the hay fields of Merchaviah, it does indicate that the Judaism of the Jew in America is no longer confined to the hearth and the synagogue and the charities, but so permeates his life as to be warp and woof of its whole fabric. This being so, the community cannot evade the responsibility of reckoning with the industrial aspects of Jewish life any more than it can with regard to its other phases.

Is there such a perfect community anywhere in this country as has been pictured? Not that I know of. In New York such a community has been planned, but has not as yet been completely achieved. It has been handicapped at the outset by the name it

adopted, "Kehilla." This name has given rise in certain quarters to an impression that the organization constitutes an imperium in imperio. The impression also has been wide-spread among many that this organization concerns itself only with orthodox religious affairs, with such subjects as *Kashruth* (the dietary laws) and Hebrew education. In reality, the purpose has been to develop a central community organization, with authority to function in communal matters of every kind. The source of that authority was to be all the people of the community; an organization, if you will, of all organizations, uptown and downtown, reform and orthodox, educational, religious, philanthropic, industrial and social.

In a free American city a sectarian community life, unlike that in eastern European countries, where it has governmental sanction and responsibility, depends upon the voluntary co-operation of the people. Because of misunderstandings of its purpose and prejudices entertained by some elements against others, and even, unfortunately, because of personal acrimony among some of the leaders, the efforts to bring about a union of forces on this broad basis have met with serious obstacles at every turn. But in spite of these difficulties, the patient and persistent labors of its leaders have achieved some part of the object in view. The chaos obtaining among a million and a quarter people—congregated from all parts of the world, with their conflicting economic, religious and social interests—has by no means been transformed as yet into an orderly system of effective co-ordination and mutual good-will. But some order has been brought out of the chaotic conditions prevailing in the Jewish educational field, a remarkable achievement in itself. Jewish education on orthodox lines may appear to the non-orthodox as unnecessary, or even to be discouraged; yet the thoughtful of every shade of theological belief have begun to realize the great need for such education and the need for its standardization. That is why many reform and even non-observant Jews in New York have contributed generously to the funds of the *Kehilla* for this purpose.

Considerable co-ordination and authority have been developed in the public ritual life of our orthodox co-religionists with regard to *Kashruth*, *mikvehs*, *ghet*, and provisional synagogues for the fall holidays. Some will question the propriety of the Jewish community as a whole being involved in such issues. But there, too, it must be conceded that these issues do affect non-observant Jews, especially when abuses have developed. When Jewish ritualism becomes commercialized the reputation of the Jews as a whole suffers. When the *mikvehs*, or ritual bathing places, are found by the city

department of health to be dirty and unsanitary, it becomes the concern of the Jewish community. When orthodox rabbis give a *ghet* contrary to statutory laws of divorce, often resulting in grave disturbances to the domestic relations of innocent parties, it is the concern of the Jews as a whole. When the establishment of synagogues during the high holidays degenerates into sordid commercialism, it becomes the affair of all of us.

Something has been accomplished in the industrial field, where in many cases of labor troubles in Jewish industries conciliation and agreement have been brought about through the intelligent and impartial intercession of that body. Something has been done in disclosing and suppressing, in co-operation with the city authorities, the vicious elements among our people, whose unsavory practices became a stench in the nostrils of the whole country and a humiliating reflection upon a people who had possessed a long and ancient record of clean and wholesome living and profound regard for law and order. Something has been achieved in promoting better co-ordination among the philanthropic activities of the community, though this field, because of the substantial interests involved and the comparatively strong co-operation already existing, demanded less of the *Kehilla's* attention than the other fields of its activity. In the federation of the employment bureau activities, a promising beginning has been made in philanthropic co-ordination, and in the projection of the Bureau of Philanthropic Research there has been placed at the community's service an adequate instrument of community study and planning. Another achievement of a notable character has been the projection of the School for Communal Workers, of which you will hear in detail to-morrow. The thoroughness of its plan of organization and curriculum is, like the plan of the Bureau of Research, indicative of the methods employed in bringing about co-operation of all the helpful elements involved.

It has not as yet, however, succeeded in becoming the central authority or completely delegated mouthpiece of community sentiment. This it can only become when all the elements and groups join. It has not yet acquired a position where it can prevent ill-considered deeds and words of irresponsible individuals who presume to speak in the community's name or on behalf of any section of them. But it has attained sufficient prestige to discourage, here and there, injudicious communal activities and to hamper their development. Believing thoroughly in the value of encouraging initiative on the part of all groups for communal work, it has only rarely raised its voice in public protest against irresponsible and unwise

movements, preferring to render friendly advice and to direct them into proper and useful channels. In one instance last winter, however, it felt impelled to administer a public rebuke to a Jewish municipal court judge, who carried on public agitation for the relief of families on the East Side threatened with eviction in a way which reflected upon the capacity of the United Hebrew Charities to deal with this problem. The public interest aroused prompted the Mayor to have an investigation made without our knowledge. At a public meeting called later by the judicial—though in this instance not judicious—agitator, the Mayor himself voiced a protest against his plans for a new organization, reporting that his investigators, under the Commissioner of Accounts, found the Charities had adequately provided for all the needs. By the action of this judge, whose motives I do not venture to analyze, the community was placed in the embarrassing situation of requiring defense from the outside against an attack from within. This is the kind of situation which a community which values its self-respect cannot altogether relish.

III.

Granting then, if we will, the soundness of the principles underlying community co-operation and organization here postulated, we come to a consideration of the national community problem. Here we are also beset with many difficulties. If our local communities were logically and effectively organized on every side, a national union of forces would simply mean a union of local communities. A democratic national federation would be a comparatively simple problem. As I stated in the beginning, there has been much dissatisfaction expressed with the leadership which now obtains in matters affecting our people throughout the country, the way in which this leadership has been developed, and some of the methods employed in its exercise. The proposed Jewish congress is in some measure a protest against it. Though unquestionably this movement for a congress has not the support of the majority of the important groups and its leadership is itself not by any means free from just criticism, it indicates that the time has come for the establishment of a unified national organization, which, analogous to the local community, must secure its authority to speak from the Jewish people throughout the land. To effect such an organization is no easy task. It is a problem of creative statesmanship which cannot be solved merely by popular clamor and vituperative criticism. The American Jewish Committee had not been organized to deal

with all Jewish problems arising in this country, but only to prevent the infraction of civic and religious rights of Jews, to secure for them equality of economic, social and educational opportunity, and to raise and administer relief funds in case of calamities. Of late, however, by virtue of the influence of its membership, it has found itself in a position of responsibility which it had not anticipated and for which it was not organized. The character of its organization should be changed to meet these newly realized responsibilities. Irresponsible individuals and groups presume to speak for American Israel in the halls of congress and in the White House. Sometimes they speak well; at others times they speak harmfully. But however they may speak, they do not speak with authority for American Jewry. The time has come when the Jews of this country should establish for themselves an authoritative body which will properly and accurately voice their sentiments on all questions in which they have a legitimate interest. The American Jewish Committee has, up to this time, been the nearest approach to such an authoritative body, consisting of men who, by lives of conspicuous devotion to the communal interests of our people, have earned the right to leadership. Nevertheless, the method of their selection has been repugnant even to a great many of our people who are satisfied to follow their leadership. Nor have their methods always been acceptable to the masses. I think it would not be amiss to say that, had this Committee been democratically selected and had it taken more interest in the local problems of interior communities; had it not only invoked their co-operation, but given them some; had it not merely uttered fiats, but sought their advice; had it not acted under an astonishingly short-sighted policy of administrative economy; had it employed the ablest field staff of propagandists and community workers all over the country, contributing advice and service to interior communities in their local problems, thereby enlisting their good will and placing them under obligations, and co-ordinating them for national and international purposes, the influence of the American Jewish Committee would have permeated every community.

The same broad principles basic to effective local community organization should be fundamental in the re-organization of an American Jewish Committee. All groups—men and women, newcomers and older settlers, religious and industrial bodies, fraternal and philanthropic, social and educational—should be united.

IV.

There is another consideration which must be emphasized, because it has been sadly lacking in community effort everywhere. There has been lacking in every community well-defined means of knowing community needs and resources. This has been particularly noticeable in the larger cities, where the population is numerous and the activities varied. The result has been a failure clearly to define programs of community work. Whatever progress has been made has been fortuitous, sporadic and sometimes unintelligent. Very little systematic study has been carried on of population, or birth rates, and very few other social statistics have been gathered. Our communities are in the position where they do not know themselves.

In New York this situation has been recognized for some time. To remedy it there has been established the Bureau of Philanthropic Research, which, as has been stated, is now in existence and busily engaged in work. The introductory statement in the report of the Committee on Plan and Scope, which will apply to any community of considerable size, reads as follows:

“The Jews of Greater New York to-day number over one million people and present a problem for philanthropy which, in the variety of its needs, multiplicity of agencies and extent of financial requirements, is comparable with the problems of the municipality. The charitable activities of the Jews in New York are carried on by about one hundred organizations, some of considerable size. In addition, there are a number of small societies local in character, and a variety of mutual benefit societies and lodges. The total expenditures of these organizations are unknown. It is probable that the budgets of the larger organizations alone during the fiscal year exceed three million dollars.

“Notwithstanding the number of organizations engaged in philanthropic endeavor, no systematic study or survey has even been attempted to determine whether they meet all the needs of the community; there is no available data regarding the community's needs or resources. Whether existing institutions fulfill their purpose or duplicate one another's work is unknown. Attempts to bring about greater co-ordination and co-operation between existing institutions have been limited and meagre. The committee is of the opinion that there is a demand for a Bureau of Philanthropic Research, for the

reason that with all the existing organizations there is not one specifically employed to study the underlying causes and effects of Jewish poverty with a view to its reduction and prevention. The existing relief societies, child-caring institutions, hospitals, etc., devote themselves to their specific problems. There is urgent need for a new organization equipped with trained workers to study the larger charitable problems of the community; to investigate existing conditions, and to help in the solution of the new problems which are daily arising."

After this Bureau has acquired experience and technique, it might well develop into a national bureau, not only for philanthropic research, but for Jewish research in general, absorbing in the process the present Bureau of Statistics of the American Jewish Committee, so that a knowledge of the life of the Jews from every side may be secured as a basis for action by any particular Jewish community or by the Jews of the country at large.

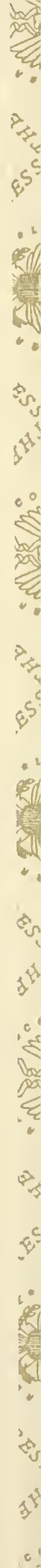
TO SUMMARIZE:

1. Serious differences obtain among various groups.
2. The present situation is one *not of lack in number of organizations, but of haphazard, aimless organization.*
3. Leadership has not been delegated, but has been benevolently assumed.
4. Certain aspects of Jewish life have been over-emphasized and others under-emphasized.
5. There has been no conscious, comprehensive community planning.

To effect co-operation and unity of action:

1. Tolerance if not mutual respect must obtain for differences of viewpoint.
2. There must be a recognition on the part of *all* that the Jewish problem concerns *all*.
3. That the problem includes all phases of Jewish life.
4. That the leadership must be representative of all elements.
5. That the leadership must base its action on actual knowledge gained by careful study and analysis.









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